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STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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[CHARLES I. PROCEEDING TO TRIAL.]

CHAPTER XIV.

ORDERS were given for the removal of all the prisoners, with the exception of Mary, to the prison of the Gate House in London. The officer who commanded the party was a stern Independent, devoted to the interests of Cromwell, whom he looked upon as a second Joshua sent to relieve a suffering and oppressed people. Most of the leaders of his sect, the more worldly motive of whose fidelity to his behests was ambition, entertained the same opinion. They already saw in him the man destined to wield the sovereignty of England, and elevate her place amongst nations.

The agony of Herbert when he beheld his wife in the arms of his rival and her deadly enemy was fearful. His heart collapsed with its agony, which was too deep for words. Tears would have been a relief, but they were denied him.

"There was another prisoner," said the officer, looking around ; "has he escaped ?"

The men searched everywhere, but no one was to be seen.

"A thin, wiry old man," added their commander. "See that he escapes not."

A second examination of the wood and shrubbery near was made, but without success. The party for whom they searched was no other than our old acquaintance, Martin, who, with an agility far beyond his years, at the very moment of the surprise had drawn himself by an overhanging branch into a tree, from which position he could both see and hear all that passed. Although his situation was a painful one, he maintained it firmly, despite the cramp in his limbs, occasioned by his being wedged between the fork of the tree. He feared even to breathe, much more to stir, lest the rustling of a leaf should have betrayed him.

"Watch over her, angels !" groaned Herbert, as he was torn away by the soldiers, his eyes to the last fixed upon the inanimate form of his young wife, who still reclined in the arms of Barford ; "protect or take her !"

Despite his frantic struggles, he was dragged away. Many a time in after-life was the agony of that bitter hour remembered.

"Mine, mine at last !" exclaimed Barford, surveying with an inflamed countenance the form of his victim. "My long years of burning agony are repaid at this hour of triumph ! The fire within my heart will soon be quenched ! Oh, what joy it will be to see her tears and listen to her prayers—watch the deep blushes of her shame as I enfold her in my eager arms !"

Laying the still prostrate burden upon a bank, he sought for water by the neighbouring brook, which ran through the chase, and returned to sprinkle it over her pale face and neck. Martin took the opportunity of his absence to glide softly from his position in the tree to the ground, and crept upon his hands and knees to a

clump of shrubs which were growing near. No sooner had he enconced himself than the ruffian returned.

"She revives!" he said; "the light of life visits once more her eyes! In a few minutes she will be mine!"

"Will she?" thought Martin to himself, as he drew a long deer-knife from his girdle. "Not if I can prevent it."

No sooner had the consciousness of her misery and the presence of her enemy returned, than Mary threw herself at his feet, and besought him, by the agony of her heart, the memory of his mother, and the fear of Heaven, to spare her weakness and respect her honour.

"Pity," she added, "pity!"

"Ay," replied the ruffian, "such pity as you had on me when I knelt, like a crushed worm, at your proud feet, and you refused me—such pity as the hungry vulture feels when the bird within its grasp turns its eye in agony and terror. No, Mary; this hour—nay, this minute—ends the impatient longing of my heart. Thou art mine! Earth could not bribe me to forego the joy, or Heaven deprive me of it!"

In an instant his arms were wound round her shrinking form, and, despite her shrieks and loathing, his lips pressed to hers. Suddenly he felt a sharp, exquisite pain between his shoulders; his grasp unloosened; and he fell with a groan upon the sward. The knife of old Martin was sticking through his shoulder-blade.

"Saved! saved!" cried Mary, falling on her knees in thankfulness. "Heaven has not forsaken me!"

"True, lady," said old Martin, raising her; "but we must not desert ourselves. The villain's horse is standing hard by—a powerful roan. We must put space between us and our enemies. Every minute is an age when safety depends upon speed and promptitude. Have you courage to mount and ride behind me?"

"Courage!" repeated Mary, clinging to his arm; "ay, to the death, to escape from worse than death. Mount, old fidelity, and away at once."

Without a word, Martin released the steed, and placed his rescued mistress before him.

As they rode the whole of the night, sparing neither the beast nor themselves, by daybreak they reached an inn, in a retired situation by the roadside, and at Martin's persuasion Mary consented to descend to partake of some refreshment. Indeed, repose was not more necessary for her than the horse, who had gallantly borne them at full speed from the danger of pursuit. His strength was all but exhausted, and an hour's rest was absolutely necessary before he could proceed with his double burden.

"And whither do you propose to direct our way?" demanded the still agitated lady.

"To London, if you approve."

"Ay, to London, to share my husband's prison—if necessary, his scaffold; for I know the cruel men into whose hands he has fallen thirst for his blood. They preach mercy and justice, but they rest upon their lips only; they have no place in their hearts."

"Have you no friends," said the faithful servitor, "where you could find concealment for a few days till this storm blows over?" for he had no great desire to see his beloved charge an inmate, although a voluntary one, of the Gate House.

"Friends! Alas! the wretched have no friends! Like summer flies, they exist but when the sky is fair and prosperity smiles on us. Let the storm come, and they disappear. Stay, stay!" she added, suddenly recollecting herself; "yes, I have a friend—one whom I have never seen, but who truly loves my husband; he is powerful, too, with these bad men."

"How do you name him?" asked Martin, doubtingly.

"Milton, the poet—the man whose soul breathes all that is noble in humanity or beautiful in nature. Herbert and he were friends at college—wandered together over sunny France and classic Italy. He has a heart pure as his fame—noble as his muse. I'll seek him; he will not refuse me aid in my despair. Perhaps he may procure my husband's liberty."

"I know nothing of him, lady," said the huntsman. "Poets are not much in my way, seeing I never read any book but the Psalter and the 'Mysteries of Venery' in my life. Therefore I cannot advise you. But if you think it better to remain concealed in this quiet hostel, fortunately, we are not without the means. My doublet is quilted with broad pieces; and, fortunately, your dress is not likely to excite suspicion. Alas the day! that I should live to see my master's daughter in a linsey gown and camlet hood, when silks and velvets are scarcely good enough for her dainty form."

Mary smiled at the old man's allusion to her dress. She still retained the disguise she had worn when she contrived to deliver the letter of Henrietta to her captive husband.

After a repose of three hours, the steed was sufficiently rested to proceed. Paying their host, who eyed them suspiciously, Martin particularly, they inquired the nearest road to a neighbouring town, and, as long as the fellow stood watching them, or could perceive them from the windows of his house, steadily pursued it; but no sooner had they turned the angle of the wood than Martin struck off in an opposite direction, taking by-paths and shaded lanes, which he well knew would conduct them in a zig-zag direction to the point he wished to steer for.

"This is not the road the host pointed out," observed Mary.

"Thank Heaven it is not," replied the old man. "I have followed the hounds too often, and am too keen a woodsman, to leave scent or trail behind me. Our host hath a villainous face—a hang-dog

look. A discerning judge would hang him on it—a jury refuse to take even the life of a dog upon his oath. I never meet such faces but I mistrust them.”

“Ride on,” sighed Mary. “Our fate is in the hands of Heaven; it hath been too bountiful to me to mistrust its protection longer. My worst fear is past.”

“It ought to be, if six inches of my good deer-knife through his shoulder-blade can quiet it. I never struck with more hearty goodwill since I have been a man. Would it had been his heart! that would have made all sure. As it is, he may recover.”

“Recover!” repeated his listener, her pale cheek becoming yet paler at the thought.

“Ay, lady; he hath as many lives as a cat. The tumble I gave him from the walls of Exeter would have broken an honest man’s neck; but he will meet with the rogue’s fortune at last—the gallows—or I am much mistaken; a discerning eye may read it in his face.”

As the hours passed on, the fears of the fugitives gradually diminished, and they passed the night with some degree of confidence at a house kept by a lone widow on the outskirts of the town through which they were compelled to pass.

The fourth day brought them safely to London, where concealment may be easily obtained by those who have money in their purses to pay for it.

The name of Milton was too well known, from his poetical fame and connection with the great political leaders of the day, for our travellers to have much difficulty in finding out his residence. Almost the first person whom they inquired of in Charing-cross directed them, and they made their way to a narrow street at the back of the Abbey, in which the author of “Paradise Lost” tenanted a suite of rooms, in order to be near the Parliament, by whom he was employed as correspondent long before his appointment to the post of Latin secretary. It was a quaint old house, situated in an angle of the street—just such a spot as Contemplation would have chosen to pore over the traditions of the past, or muse upon the future. The apartment into which they were shown, although plainly furnished, bore many indications of its master’s literary tastes and pursuits. Several busts in terracotta, and pictures, reminiscences of his visit to Italy, were upon the walls, and books and costly manuscripts piled on the table, where mathematical instruments, a violin, manuscript music, and a vase of flowers were placed in artist-like confusion. A painter would have felt a pleasure in sketching that table. The domestic—a quiet, Puritanical-looking woman, whose unsullied wimple and linen cuffs might have graced a Flemish picture—civily requested them to be seated while she informed her master of their arrival.

“He must have a kind heart,” said Mary, looking round the table,

"for he is fond of flowers. Where Nature's simplest tastes are given her purer feelings accompany the gift. See," she added, "music too! I feel that I can trust him."

Although Martin did not exactly comprehend her mode of reasoning, and had a profound mistrust of everyone who bore the name of Puritan, he acquiesced in her opinion. He had not the courage to say one word which could crush the last hope to which her heart still clung.

In a few moments the poet entered the apartment.

Milton at this period was in the prime of manhood, and possessed that remarkable grace of person which is independent of form or feature, but derives its source from the harmony of the mind. His chestnut hair, parted over his lofty forehead, fell in silky waving curls over his shoulder, and contrasted finely with his well-formed throat, which the open Vandyke he wore displayed. He was attired in a loose gown of mulberry-coloured camlet, through the open slashes of which the long Holland linen sleeves, edged with point lace, were seen. Bowing with well-bred ease—for he had mixed with princes and the master spirits of the earth, not as an equal, but an idol—he demanded the cause of their visit.

"Hope!" said Mary, clasping her hands, and fixing her eyes imploringly upon him.

"Hope!" repeated the poet.

"The hope that I should find thee the generous being his lips I love have named thee; the hope that God hath given thee a heart to feel the misery of others—to use thy influence with cruel men to save thy friend from death, his wife from madness. My husband—save him!" she added, sinking on her knees, and clinging to him, "and my lips shall bless thee, my boy be taught to lisp thy name in his first prayer. Nay, I will promise thee a greater recompense—*thine own pure heart shall bless thee!*"

"Rise, madam," said the poet, struck by her manner and the passionate energy of her language, by which he saw at once that her peasant costume was only assumed as a disguise; "tell me the name of the husband whose danger thus alarms your woman's heart, and whose fate for your sake interests mine."

"Herbert, the companion of your youth—Herbert, who loves you with a brother's love."

"Herbert!" repeated Milton, "a prisoner! where?"

"In the Gate House."

"And his crime?"

"An attempt to rescue the king. He is a Royalist, and you," she added, "lend the influence of your powerful genius—the weight of your name—to aid the people's cause; but that should not divide your hearts, since both act but as duty prompts. Herbert would not abandon you——"

"Nor I abandon Herbert," interrupted the poet. "Lady, you

little know my heart if you deem that time can cool its friendship or blunt its boyhood's feelings. If my influence is small with those who now rule England, blame not that; you shall not reproach my zeal. You, too, are a fugitive?"

"Ay, from worse than death—from the bitter enemy who has passed between me and the sunshine of my days—from Barford."

"Barford!" repeated Milton, in surprise.

"Ay; you know him not. Men think him honest, for he speaks them fair, even while scheming to outwit them. He hath the kindest words upon his lip even when plotting misery and shame. His passions are the fiend's—destructive as the volcano's burning stream; nay, more," she continued, with a blush, "for that destroys but life—his aims are at honour."

A flush passed over the pale brow of the listener as Mary thus conveyed to him the nature of the danger from which she fled. His pure and manly heart felt for her wrongs and misery, for he loved her husband, and he mentally resolved to try all means to procure his liberation; nor was he altogether hopeless of success, since, independent of his personal influence with the leaders of the triumphant party, Cromwell he knew would hesitate to break with him, as he feared the eloquence both of his tongue and pen. Summoning the same domestic who had received the travellers on their arrival, he informed her that the lady and her attendant would be his guests for some few days, and bade her prepare chambers for their reception.

"Nay," he said, smiling at the thanks with which Mary would have overwhelmed him, "where should you rest but with Herbert's friends? Besides," he added, "though my lodging is a poor one, it is safer, lady, than many a stately pile—the poor respect it, and e'en the powerful would pause before they offered outrage to its inmates."

"True," said Mary, gratefully, "for it is guarded by Genius and Fame."

Without replying to her compliment but by a quiet smile, Milton requested her to relate to him all the particulars of the attempted escape of Charles; how it was defeated, and the means of her own escape. The story was soon told, all but the name of Herbert's fellow-prisoner—even to the generous man beside her she would not betray that the nephew of the king, the gallant Rupert, had been the companion of his unfortunate attempt.

The point which most attracted the curiosity of her host was the incident of the sentinel and the stern man, shrouded in a cloak, who commanded him to fire.

"You have, indeed, been sadly tried for one so young and gently nurtured," he observed, as she finished her narration; "but tell me, what kind of man was he who gave directions to fire on the unhappy king?"

"A heavy, burly person, whose slouched beaver so hid his brow I could not scan his features; but his voice, I well remember that—it came from his clenched teeth like a serpent's hiss or restless spirit's whisper. To my astonishment, the instant the alarm was given he fled."

"'Twas he!" muttered Milton, with an expression of countenance which denoted that he had received a painful impression. "As I feared! as I feared! Ambition hath crept into his heart—the temple is defiled—the cherubim hath fled!"

"You know him, then?" observed Mary.

"Well; he is a man of good and evil nature, one who seeks the right path, but crosses sloughs and unclean ways to reach it. I must see this man; your husband's fate depends on him. I need not name him to you."

"Let me go with you," she replied. "If he hath a heart my misery may touch it. Friendship's voice I know is fervent; but, oh! it hath not the eloquence of a wife's despair."

"It would be useless," said Milton, with an accent of pity; "with me alone he may speak freely, not before another. But tell me, how came your project to rescue the king betrayed?"

"I have something here," said old Martin, "that may throw a light upon that part of our unlucky work. I took it from Barford's bosom after I had struck him down."

He handed a letter, spotted in several places with blood, to the master of the house, who, after perusing it attentively, placed it in the pocket of his doublet.

"Thou hast done well, old fidelity. This letter may render good aid to thy master's cause. Lady, deem not that I am churlish in not doing the honours of the poor repast my house can offer; but if I leave you it is to serve you in the way dearest to your heart—in working to procure the freedom of my friend."

"Bless you, generous man!" said Mary, kissing his hand; "Heaven bless you!"

Bowing gravely, he raised in his turn the hand of his guest to his lips, and left the room. In the description which the Lady of Stanfield had given of the stranger who had sought to take the life of Charles, Milton recognised the person of Cromwell, and it confirmed the suspicion he had long entertained that ambition was obtaining the mastery of his better nature. The discourse which had passed between them on the night of Hampden's funeral returned with painful freshness to his memory. He determined to seek him at the hour when he knew he would have left the House, where the Independent party, since the capture of the king out of the hands of the Presbyterians by Joyce, and the advance of the army, which was entirely under the influence of Cromwell, to London, assumed an arrogant position. Their leader was all-powerful with the Parliament.

A few minutes after the above interview Milton left his quiet home, and directed his steps towards the residence of Cromwell. As he was one of the few who were deep in his political counsels, and consequently intrusted with the mystery of the secret door, he knew at all times how to obtain admission, but had to repeat the signal twice before he could obtain access, and when admitted failed not to observe the surprise which his visit at such an hour occasioned.

"Why, poet-dreamer," half-playfully and half-inquiringly, exclaimed the master of the mansion, "what brings thee here? Has the muse been coy to thy wooing, or does aught threaten the good cause?"

"The worst that can befall it."

"How so?" demanded Cromwell.

"Crime hath tainted it—ambition spread its hideous leprosy round the heart of him who should direct the movement of a people rising in their strength, and not pervert it to his evil passions. The sword of Justice becomes an assassin's knife when guided by private hatred or interested hands."

"What meanest thou?"

"Thy attempt to slay the king!"

Cromwell started from his chair, his dark-grey eyes flashing beneath their bushy penthouse-lids. He felt both shame and fear at the accusation—shame that it should have reached the ears of a man so honoured as the poet, and fear lest it should become known; for such an act would give the Royalist party, who were now joined with the Presbyterians, a fearful lever to move public opinion against him. In his heart bitterly did he curse the impatience which had goaded him on to an attempt unworthy of his fame, and contrary to the dictates of his judgment.

"Who will believe this?" he demanded after a pause, during which these remarkable men surveyed each other like two gladiators about to encounter in the arena.

"If I assert it," replied the poet, with a flush of honest pride, "all men—even thy flatterers, although they veil their thoughts and give the lie to their convictions to pleasure thee. Posterity will believe it, for the words of truthful men can never die. Like truth itself, they are immortal. Bury a truth beneath the sea—pile mountains on it—the weight of waters shall not keep it down, the mountains' pressure not impede its rising to the light of Heaven."

The leader of the Independents remained silent.

"Was it worthy of thee?" continued the speaker. "Charles, struck by any but the hand of Justice, becomes a martyr, not a sacrifice. The deed would corrupt our cause so fearfully that men could not perceive the germ of truth the hideous deed concealed."

"Enough, enough!" said Cromwell. "I do repent me of the

thought. I have wrestled with it in spirit, but the man of flesh prevailed. There are hours, John, when I grow weary of the struggle, and think the Lord hath abandoned me—when I doubt Him and all things.”

“Such is the fate of most men. Were there no struggle, where would be the triumph? Faith and doubt are the enemies contending in thee. Trust to Him who hath led thee thus far; he will accomplish the work in His own time. Man cannot hasten or retard His will one hour.”

“I do repent.”

“To repent is not enough. Thou must atone.”

“How?” demanded Cromwell, in surprise; “how atone?”

“By an act of mercy. Thy prisoners—the two men who planned and all but succeeded in effecting the escape of Charles Stuart—release them; their crime was less than thine, since they erred, if they erred at all, on the side of humanity.”

“Release them!—impossible!” said his hearer, doggedly. “This very night the affair will be brought before Parliament. I have given notice of my intention to speak touching the perjured monarch’s breach of faith, to show what fools the commissioners have been to trust him. How, then, can I release them? I have a duty to my country to perform; I will not shrink from it.”

“I have a duty to Heaven, Oliver, which is still more sacred. Here is a letter, written in thy hand, in which, as a price of his treasons, thou givest a noble lady to the power of her enemy—a brutal ravisher—a villain whose name would taint the holiest cause. Shame on thy manhood and thy nature! Born of woman, wouldst thou dishonour her? Man, whom God hath blessed with children, did not the recollection of thine own fair daughter plead? What cause would be worth so vile a price?”

“My country’s.”

“Say rather thy ambition’s. Heaven asks no sacrifice of virtue or of principle as a means of right. Its altar would reject it.”

“Thou art a stern censor.”

“Because I am a true one. Be just to thine own nature and thy future fame. This thirst for the blood of Charles savours more of the butcher than of the pontifex—of the ambitious leader than the patriot. If he hath sinned against the people, let the people judge him. History would then applaud the blow; for justice would direct it, and the outraged majesty of humanity, whose rights he hath trampled on, be satisfied.”

“The man whose life thou askest is a Royalist.”

“But no traitor,” observed Milton. “He hath done his duty as conscience whispered him.”

“And his companion?”

“I know not him. But Herbert is the friend of my youth; I know his nature, and admire it for its truthfulness and honour.

His wife, whom thou wouldst have consigned to shame—to misery so dark and hopeless that even the mercy of Heaven could have left her no consolation but the grave—it was her arm which saved thee from a crime.”

“Her husband, then, shall live,” said Cromwell; “be it the proof of my repentance that I spared him. But the villain Barford told me she was his mistress.”

“He lied. Mistress!” repeated the poet; “the wife of thy bosom is not more pure. She is the daughter of the stout knight of Keinton. Although I never saw her face but once, I could swear her heart is noble; for she hath eyes from whence her spirit looks upon the world and scorns its sordidness.”

“And the interview took place this day?”

Milton was silent.

“At thy own house?” continued the speaker; “nay, I doubt not but she still remains an inmate with thee. Well, I seek not to pry into thy secret; nor do I love thee less that thou hast rebuked me—shown me my heart as in a mirror, where I have read my black defect.”

Taking up a blank sheet of paper, he wrote an order to the officer commanding the party of soldiers at the Gate House for the liberation of the Lord of Stanfield and the gentleman imprisoned with him, whom he either did not or affected not to know. Added to it was a safe-conduct for five days, to enable them to leave the kingdom.

“Art thou satisfied?” he demanded, as he handed the paper to his visitor.

“And that letter?”

In an instant it was consumed in the flame of the lamp burning on the table.

“Fare thee well!” said Milton; “thou hast half-redeemed thy error.”

Fast as the darkness of the night permitted, the poet made his way to the Gate House prison, where Herbert and Prince Rupert were confined. The latter, although recognised by many Cavaliers who were prisoners like himself, had not been betrayed. Not one, to save himself, had whispered his name.

On the officer presenting them to Milton, despite his disguise, he knew the illustrious captive at a glance, for he had met him frequently on the Continent as well as in England.

“’Tis strange,” said the officer, eying the signature to the order of release, which, had it been presented by a person less known than the bearer of it, he would at once have suspected to have been forged; “the general’s commands were most strict touching these prisoners, and now comes a release.”

“More,” said Milton showing the second paper, “a safe-conduct for five days to quit the realm. Are you satisfied?”

"Why, yes ; but had anyone but yourself been the bearer of it, Master Milton, I almost think I should have questioned it, although the signature is certainly the general's. I could swear to the 'O ;' the 'Cr' looks suspicious."

"You dispute it, then ?"

"I dispute nothing. Write me a receipt that you delivered the order to me, and received these men. If there be anything wrong in the affair, you and the general must settle it."

Milton wrote the required receipt, and after embracing Herbert, led him and his companion from the prison. No sooner had they passed the guards than his friend grasped his hand ; a question he feared to ask was on his tongue, but despair and emotion held it back. At last he faltered the name of Mary.

"Is safe quite safe, beneath my roof."

"Thank Heaven !" exclaimed Herbert clasping his hands in passionate gratitude ; "true-hearted friend, whom the world's dissensions cannot turn from pity and misfortune ! Under your roof—the shade of genius and virtue ! Then she is safe, safe as in God's own temple. What villainy would dare assail her there ? But tell me," he added "how did she escape the ruffian who—my heart sickens as I name him."

"By the aid of an old servitor—Martin, I think she named him."

"God bless him for that act ; faithful, good old man !"

It was only by the quiet deference with which Milton treated his companion that he gave the slightest indication of knowing how illustrious was the guest he was about to entertain.

As they reached the door of his humble abode the poet paused.

"Joy hath its pains, Herbert," he said "as well as grief. Your sudden, unexpected presence may disturb the reason of your wife. I must prepare her."

"She is ill then," said her husband, his former fears returning ; "perhaps dying ! Oh ! let me know the truth !"

"Ill, certainly ; but, believe me, I saw no symptoms of death. Fatigue both of body and spirit she hath endured ; but, trust me, Herbert, no other wrong. Her defender's arm was to swift, and the blow too surely struck, to permit the villain to complete his purpose."

The quiet pressure of the hand indicated how heavy a weight the speaker's words removed from the anxious husband's heart.

Mary and Martin were seated in the room where the poet left them when Milton returned. The repast was untouched before her—her heart was too full to eat—a little wine alone had passed her lips, and her eyes were dimmed with tears. They suddenly brightened, however, as she gazed upon the handsome countenance of her kind host. Despite his wish to appear calm, there was a cheerful expression, a sweet content in his placid features, such as the consciousness of a good act cannot fail to give.

"Speak!" she exclaimed. "One word—is there hope?"

"There is."

"Oh! thank Heaven! my child—my boy will not be left without a father! my heart will not be condemned to loneliness worse than the grave! Have you seen Herbert?"

"I have seen him."

"Is he ill—wounded—despairing? Does he know that I am safe under your generous care?"

"He does; and I did think that could you bear the interview, you in a few days, perhaps hours, might see him too."

"Fear not," said the excited Mary. "I will be firm, quite firm. His prison will have no terror for me. You cannot tell how strong my heart is. It may break with grief, but not with joy. Let me see him to-night, to know that he lives—to feel that he lives! Oh, take me to him!"

Herbert, who was standing at the door with the prince, heard her voice, and unable longer to control his emotion, and the impatient yearning of his heart, rushed along the passage towards the apartment.

"It is his step," she cried, as soon as she heard it. "My heart hath listened to its echo too often to be deceived. Herbert—husband!"

The next moment saw them folded in each other's arms. Martin wept for joy, and inwardly acknowledged that even a Puritan might be worthy of respect. Milton looked on and smiled; his heart experienced that blissful sensation which the consciousness of a good action imparts. Happy were the hours of the remaining portion of the night. The next day Herbert and his wife departed for France. It was a point on which Rupert was peremptory. While a hope remained of saving his royal uncle, nothing, he declared, should induce him to quit England; but he nobly refused to involve his companion any further in the risk of his adventures.

The removal of Charles to Carisbrook Castle, and his being brought to London previous to his trial, are events too well known to need recording here. The party of the Independents triumphed in the Parliament, and preparations were made in Westminster Hall for the judging of the king. When men heard the news, they doubted the evidence of their ears—the boldness of the step appalled them. Many said that they would never dare to proceed to extremities with their monarch. They little knew the resolution of those who were now the masters of his destiny.

The space before Westminster Hall on the first morning of the trial was crowded with citizens—men with pale faces and anxious eyes—waiting the royal captive's sad approach, as of a victim led to sacrifice.

The procession at last appeared. Charles walked in the midst of his guards with an air as cold and stately as in the days of his

power, when the multitude ran cheering before him. Now how changed ! A group of infuriated soldiers and sullen fanatics accompanied the guard, calling for vengeance and imprecating curses on his uncrowned head. Close to the mob four or five gentlemen might be seen, whose looks of indignation spoke their sympathy.

"Heaven, what a scene is this !" observed one, who seemed to be their leader.

"Traitors !" muttered another between his teeth, as the crowd pressed near him.

As the fallen monarch passed he caught their eye, and recognised in the first speaker his gallant nephew, Rupert. Under pretence of wiping his beard, he gently inclined his head.

At this moment a low ruffian, more daring than the others, raised a handful of mud and cast it in the captive's face. A loud hiss burst from the crowd ; even the Puritans were indignant. The fellow, who had expected applause for his brutality, slunk away. The king calmly wiped his face with his kerchief, and passed on.

"Follow the villain," whispered Rupert to his companion. "If I die for it that outrage shall not pass unavenged !"

The man had not withdrawn far from the crowd before he was seized by two of the Cavaliers, and dragged under the archway of a mansion near, the gates of which were instantly closed. As the eyes of the mob were all directed towards the king, the action passed unperceived, and his cries were unheard.

"Dog !" said Rupert, "what hast thou done ?"

"Mercy !" sighed the fellow.

"Thou hast raised thy hand against the anointed one of God —outraged thy monarch in his misfortune ! Hadst thou as many lives as crimes, for this thou shalt die !"

"Mercy !" again exclaimed the man.

"My only regret is," added the prince, "that noble gentlemen must stain their swords ; thou art fit only for the hangman's hands ; but since it must be, I will set the example : so perish all who outrage misfortune !"

With these words the speaker plunged his weapon into the heart of the callous ruffian ; the rest of the Cavaliers, following his example, drew their swords, and his body was quickly pierced with wounds. Writhing like a bruised reptile, the wretch yelled forth his soul in one deep cry of agony and despair. The body was buried in the courtyard where it fell.

"Come, gentlemen," said the prince, sheathing his weapon, "let us on to see the issue of this tragedy. If we cannot save, we may, perchance, avenge our monarch."

The gates of the mansion were once more opened, and the party directed their steps towards Westminster Hall.

CHAPTER XV.

THE place appointed for the trial of King Charles was the site of the old courts of Chancery, at the upper end of Westminster Hall, which was divided by strong barriers placed across it. The Gothic portals, soon after the arrival of the prisoner, were opened to the people, who assembled in immense crowds to witness the unusual proceeding. Everywhere, within the hall and without, were soldiers under arms—every avenue was guarded by the stern Independents, who thirsted for his blood as the seal of their triumph. The king was brought in a sedan chair to the bar, where a chair, covered with velvet, was placed for him. He looked sternly upon the court and the people in the galleries on each side of him, and sat down without moving his hat. His judges returned his severe glances, and also remained covered. Upon calling over their names, sixty of the commissioners answered. Bradshaw, as president of the court, informed the prisoner why he was brought before them :

“For war made on the people, to deprive them of those liberties which are their just inheritance ; for having levied taxes upon their goods without the consent of Parliament, the only lawful authority through which the nation can be taxed ; for bloodshed, and treason to the people.”

“Treason !” repeated Charles, with a contemptuous smile, which Bradshaw paid no attention to, except by ordering Coke, the solicitor of the Commonwealth, to read the accusation at full.

The lawyer rose, and was about to speak, when Charles held up his cane, and touched him two or three times with it on the shoulder. In doing so, the gold head dropped off, and rolled to the feet of Cromwell. All present regarded it as an omen of ill-fortune to the king, and a presage of future greatness to the daring man whose hand was already on the sceptre. Even Charles was struck by the incident, and instead of the speech which he had intended to deliver, he merely exclaimed :

“Hold ! hold !”

“Go on,” said Bradshaw, in a deep, stern voice. “We sit here in the majesty of Justice, and no voice must be heard save hers. The hour for the defence has not yet arrived.”

“No, nor the execution,” whispered Ireton in the ear of his father-in-law. “Although, to judge from the president’s manner, they are not far distant.”

“He is a man who tampers not with his convictions,” replied Oliver.


“No, nor his conscience, for fear of disturbing it,” muttered Ireton to himself, for he was too politic to breathe such a thought aloud.

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